

An Occupational Performance

Introduction

The process of learning to be a doctor, doing a PhD, can be seen in new ways, when viewed through the spectacles of the occupational scientist.

Wilcock has described occupation as **doing, being and becoming** (Wilcock, 1998). In **'doing-a-PhD'**, an occupational form can be described, as can an occupational performance (Nelson, 1988). An occupation can also be examined for social and personal meaning if we examine the dimensions of **'being'** and **'becoming'** (Hasselkus, 2002). *Who I am* when engaging in an occupation such as a PhD, relates to who I am *becoming* through that engagement; occupation helps to shape identity.

The reader is invited to join me in co-constructing an understanding of the experience of an occupation. Each reader brings her or his own perspective to this understanding.

The aim of the study is to construct an understanding of the lived experience of an occupation: 'doing a PhD'.

Epistemology

I write from a position which assumes that realities are multiple, and that meaning, and the self, are socially constructed. Reality is subject to the interpretation of the researched, the researcher and the reader. I also make an assumption that subjective accounts of experience have much to offer in developing understandings that are of value to researchers and therapists.

How is this research useful?

- it helps the researcher to understand the experience of others
- it may help others to understand their own experiences better.(Ellis & Bochner, 2003)

Generalisation from the findings of this study are not possible in the positivist sense of the word, but what I present here may have some resonance for the reader.

References

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- Wilcock, A. (1998). Reflections on doing, being and becoming. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 65, 248-256.

Method

Autoethnography is used here to record and explore the experience of an occupation, 'doing a PhD'.

Autoethnography is a methodology which makes the researcher's own experience the focus of study (Ellis & Bochner, 2003).

Ellis and Bochner would regard the normal focus for such work as **turning points in life**. As someone interested in occupations, however, I am drawn to study **everyday experiences**, which can be equally transformative.

Autoethnography requires the recording and study of the concrete, detailed minutiae of life – the traces and records that give clues to experience and meaning. This level of personal detail can be examined hermeneutically against broader cultural and societal contexts.

Sources of Data

The concrete traces of my engagement with this occupation include **physical artefacts**, real and virtual **documentary evidence**, and personal narrative accounts contained in **memory or written records**. They include:-

Work diary	PhD logbook
Computer files	Filing cabinet
Bookshelf	Study walls
Correspondence	Easel
Lever arch files	Desk
email discussion groups etc	
Miscellaneous: wall charts, scraps of paper, telephone messages	

Findings

Some aspects of the exploration are illustrated on the adjacent diagram.

The following factors appear to be closely interwoven with the shaping of my identity through occupation:-

My past history: who I have been

My emotional and intellectual reactions and development

The organization of time and my physical environment

My position in relation to other people

Acknowledgements

Prof Stephen Kay guides me in this process. Gill Crofts is a fellow traveller. I thank them for helping me to become.



My bookshelves, computer files and filing cabinet give clues to my cognitive organisation. Re-organisations often mean my ideas have developed.

I buy books when I could be buying shoes!

Maintaining the work-life-study balance is difficult. My diaries show long days, and the juggling of tasks and guilt.

Why is it difficult to classify this occupation as 'work'? Because I do a lot of it in my own time and it gives me pleasure?! Because of my working class roots? Or because, as a health care lecturer? Am I a *real academic*?

The PhD is everywhere! In my kitchen, in my car! Always in my bag!

An issue for me is my lack of ease with the legitimacy of this topic for research (is it sensible / interesting / worthwhile? Who cares?).

Being a postgraduate student is an isolating occupation. How do my colleagues and friends see my PhD and me?

Evidence of change within me is that I re-read papers, and they mean something different, with each reading.

My logbook records a struggle about identity which resulted, recently, in a change of work-role. This change might result in further identity change. *I am becoming*

Who will I be in 3 years time?

Am I playing out my father's ambitions for me to become an academic?

A woman of the 21st century, born in the '50s. I struggle with the ingrained self-fulfilling prophecies of my class and gender. Can I be a researcher?!

I have bird watching binoculars on my desk, and a potted fern on a high shelf which taps me on the head and reminds me that there is more to life! 'Doing-a-PhD' is grounded in the reminders of the pleasures of life-outside-the-PhD.

I am privileged to have access to people and their lives. I collect my data, and I am infected with their enthusiasm; moved by their narratives.

The stream of consciousness within my logbook, is fragmented, lacking coherence. I have been troubled by this, but have adapted. Doing a PhD is a messy business! So is thinking.

My diary shows lunch & coffee dates. Stimulating & supportive times with a PhD pal. Not a friend, nor a work colleague, but a PhD pal! New support networks.

Research means being creative. My logbook, wall charts & papers show this. I bemoan my lack of time for gardening and baking, but creativity is evident in the pictorial representations of my ideas.

My past might *hamper* my ambitions, but I do not believe that they *block* them. I am an active (and reflexive) agent, constructing my own life (Green, 1998).

Cautiously, I expose my ideas to the world of occupational science. Raising your head above the parapet is a difficult thing to do. *I am becoming an academic*

Will I finish it?

my past

doing

being

becoming